

The Risks of Buying or Selling Vehicles Using the Internet

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The Internet has made the buying and selling of a funeral vehicle much easier. Finding the exact vehicle you need or finding a buyer for your funeral vehicle is now just a few keystrokes away when using the Internet. Unfortunately these transactions are often done remotely, without ever seeing the vehicle you may be buying or seeing the buyer of your vehicle. Most of these transactions happen as intended, but not all. Using the Internet it is Buyer/Sell Beware.

Buying and selling items online comes with a number of inherent risks. Fraud is chief among these and has made the convenience of the online market place dangerous and frustrating. Predators are constantly scanning the web for their next victim and their schemes have become more devious and deceptive. It seems that almost everyone has a personal anecdote concerning fraud online. Michael Jamar, the operations manager of HearseHub was recently contacted by a funeral vehicle dealership that experienced fraud first hand. His story has become all-too-common.

An individual from another state contacted the dealership and after some negotiations purchased a hearse. This person had a phone number, an email address and physical address. He also portrayed himself as part owner of a Ford dealership.

A fraudulent check for over \$50,000 was sent for the vehicle. The check was from a real Ford dealership in Mississippi and looked quite real. Luckily the dealership contacted the Ford dealership and found that the person had nothing to do with the dealership.

It has been reported that this same scheme might have been tried a second time, but this has not been confirmed yet.

The dealership is not sure that this lead came through HearseHub, but how the con artist found the dealership is not important, the important thing is that you are aware of this attempted fraud and guard against it.

While this story is alarming, there are many ways a buyer or seller can help protect themselves from criminals. Chris A. McCulloch, CFE Vice President / Corporate Fraud Manager Enterprise Bank & Trust recently spoke with Michael Jamar and was able to shed some important light on the vigilant safeguards one can take in the online marketplace. While some may appear simplistic, these methods are extremely effective and important to keep in mind during all future online transactions.

- When selling a vehicle fraud almost always starts with the crook asking you to wire money back. Why wire money back? Often they will send you a check for more than the agreed upon amount, sometimes it is thousands over. They will always have an excuse as to why this has happened and will ask you to wire back the overage through Western Union. By wiring the money they will get your money immediately, while the check can take weeks to be returned as bad or fraudulent. Why Western Union? Because Western Union wires to an individual and not to a location. A person can say they are in Oklahoma, when they are actually in Dubai. Basically you have a bad check, they have the money you wired them, and in the worse case scenario, they may also have your vehicle.
- Another important point to remember is that a criminal will almost never use a bank for getting funds. Why? Because banks require a recipient and a location. If the person insists you use Western Union and will not consider a back for the transaction, this should raise many red flags immediately.
- Official/Cashier checks are like gold, right? Wrong. These checks are as easily counterfeited as any check. If possible always ask for a Cashier's Check to be drawn on a bank that has local branches. You can verify a Cashier's Check with the issuing bank immediately. If not, you can ask your bank to 'send it for collection.' This requires the check to be mailed to the issuing bank and then they will respond with a guaranteed check. The downside is the process can take weeks.
- Money wire transferred to you is like money in your pocket? Wrong. A thief can hack into a legitimate account and wire you money from that account. It maybe weeks before the theft of the money is reported and by that time your vehicle is gone along with your money, because ultimately that money will be returned to the rightful owner, at your expense. Try not to have anyone you don't trust wire funds directly into your account. This process gives the hackers your account number, which may result in you becoming their next victim. Many banks can offer a "Pay upon proper id" service. This way the money is wire transferred into a bank holding account and not directly into your account. This option does not give the crooks your account number.
- The person you are working has an email address from a legitimate company, or the web site they send you to appears to be the "Official" web site of a legitimate company so you are safe, right? Wrong. Neither means anything in the Internet world. Email accounts can be spoofed and web sites that look legitimate may or may not be.

The Internet is a daunting and dangerous marketplace. Working with a known entity, like one of the many funeral vehicle dealerships is always your best bet for completing a safe and satisfactory transaction. But for those times you must deal with an unknown individual or even company, please keep the strategies featured above in the forefront. But do not think these suggestions, as valuable as they are, will keep you safe, because crooks and con artists are very creative and resourceful individuals. As Chris A. McCulloch put it "... as soon as we become aware of one fraud and neutralize it as best we can, another is there to take its place." Be ever vigilant in your Internet transactions, follow the suggestions above and if anything about the transaction seems suspicious then talk to someone you trust, like your banker. For more information, contact your local bank or visit the Federal Trade Commission website.